



Testimony to the Appropriations Committee
Office of Early Childhood- February 17, 2022

I am writing to comment on House Bill 5037 AAC the State Budget for the Biennium
Ending June 30th, 2023

From: Fred Brisbois
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To: Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France, and
members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Fred Brisbois. My daughter was developmentally delayed as an infant and the intervention services she received at a young age had a tremendous and positive impact on her development as she aged. I am also on the SARAH Inc. Board of Directors. SARAH Inc. is a non-profit organization providing services to more than 1400 children and adults with differing abilities across 5 counties, in 50 towns, in Connecticut. Based on my experience as a father of a child who received intervention services and my observations as a member of the SARAH Inc. Board of Directors, I have a profound appreciation for the importance of early intervention. It is the 'right thing to do' for young children and it is an investment in the future both for the individual and the State. Early intervention has the potential to reduce services required by the children as they age.

SARAH Inc.'s KIDSTEPS program meets the developmental needs of children ages 0-3 who have disabilities or delays. Our team, like other providers in the state, are there for the families during every step of the process in their children's early developmental stages including evaluations to transitioning into school systems. Our program is built around the foundation of a parent being a child's best advocate and it is our responsibility to provide parents with all the tools they need to best help their children. This is becoming more and more difficult with the funding challenges we are currently facing.

Not identifying children in need of early intervention services or struggling to deliver services to those who are eligible, is not only tragic for the child, but has negative impacts for their communities and the economy. Nobel Prize winning economist John Heckman is known for his work on the economics of human potential. Making investments in early childhood education reduces deficits and strengthens the economy. "The highest rate of return in early childhood development comes from investing as early as possible. Starting at age three or four is too little too late, as it fails to recognize that skills beget skills in a complimentary and dynamic way. Efforts should focus on the first years for the greatest efficiency and effectiveness." John Heckman, December 7, 2012

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Unfortunately, Connecticut Birth to Three providers have not had a rate increase or rate review in the last 5 years, since rates were initially established in 2017, nor have providers received any direct ARPA payments to provide financial relief from COVID. We are required to do even more without any change in reimbursement. The next planned rate review is still 2 years away, meaning we will not have had any rate adjustments for **7 years!** Providers are dealing with the ever-increasing costs related to basic benefits for staff, including the inability to pay competitive wages to attract and retain staff in times when there is also an extreme workforce shortage in early intervention. We need help. In addition, the increased funding for non-profits agreed to last legislative session DOES NOT include Birth to Three Services.

These funding challenges directly impact all Birth to Three providers and almost 10,000 children and families by extension. We no longer have the financial means necessary to pay competitive wages to attract and maintain employees causing a statewide work shortage in the Early Intervention field. Staffing vacancies directly impact families which causes extreme service delays, program closures, and more.

If something doesn't change, and quick, the families like I previously mentioned might not receive the services that they need and deserve.

Please help SARAH Inc. and other essential Birth to Three providers by:

- Including Birth to Three services as part of any Cost-of-Living Adjustment in the budget
- Revising regulations to provide timely and predictable rate increases for programs to account for doing business in Connecticut.
- Revising funding streams to support long-term General Administrative Payment increases.
- Providing an interim increase in funding to the monthly General Administrative Payment to \$200 per enrolled child.
- Immediately increasing Birth to Three rates by 10% to help sustain all Early Intervention agencies in Connecticut.

I respectfully ask that you remember SARAH Inc. and other Birth to Three providers during the upcoming legislative session. We are providing essential services without adequate rates to sustainably continue to fund our services.

Thank you,



Fred Brisbois